



CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

DATE: March 10, 2009

TO: Chair Lawrence and Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Wendy Block Sanford, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: North Washington Street Streetscape

BACKGROUND

The City is working with the firm of EDAW Inc. to develop a "green" streetscape for N. Washington Street that will create a lively and walkable street-level environment, and filter and slow stormwater runoff from adjacent properties. The design will incorporate Low Impact Development (LID) strategies such as raingardens, permeable pavements, and bioretention areas.

EDAW is a nationally recognized urban design and landscape architecture firm that is partnering with the Low Impact Development Center, a leader in research and development of innovative LID techniques. EDAW is also working with Rinker Design Associates (engineering), Syska Hennessy Group (lighting), and the Care of Trees. The contract amount for this project is \$306,665.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The streetscape design for North Washington Street will be unique in that it will not only create a more lively pedestrian experience for the corridor and create new linkages to existing City amenities, it will also filter and slow stormwater runoff. The streetscape design will tell a story along the corridor, highlighting the existing gateways – East Falls Church and Broad Street - and creating new gateways as well. For instance, the plan proposes to create a N. Washington Street entrance to Madison Park at the Miller House property (City owned). The plan shows a new trail from this area to Madison Park, which is located one block behind North Washington Street. This area would also serve as an LID demonstration area. Educational signage would be located in this area and along the corridor explaining the LID techniques.

In terms of design techniques, the plan proposes the use of a number of LID technologies. For instance, the plan proposes the use of terraced bioretention cells on the sloped portions of the street that would collect stormwater, filter it, and allow it to slowly move through a series of steps or terraces and infiltrate the ground. The stormwater would be collected from curb inlets on the street and from cuts into the bioretention cells adjacent to the sidewalk. The vegetation used in the planters would be appropriate for bioretention areas and would not require additional irrigation.

In addition, the Plan proposes the use of both traditional and permeable pavement. Permeable pavement is designed to allow stormwater to infiltrate into the ground. The design includes perforated pipes below the surface to drain stored water. Permeable pavement is a good alternative to traditional pavement since it allows stormwater to infiltrate through areas that are typically impervious.

The City will also be using street furnishings (benches, recycling containers) made from recycled materials. As with the Broad Street streetscape, the City will maintain the N. Washington Street streetscape once it is installed. The City is working with EDAW to ensure that the materials used in the streetscape are readily available and within the City's budget. In addition, the team is coordinating the review of the proposed streetscape plan with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) since North Washington Street is part of the National Highway System. All of the proposed streetscape elements would be installed behind the face of the curb and would not impact the travel lanes. However, VDOT review is still required to ensure that line-of-sight and other requirements for streetscape elements are met.

The EDAW Project Manager will be attending the worksession to describe the proposed plan in further detail. Note that the final product will be a set of 60% engineering drawings (primarily conceptual), and a set of design guidelines.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPATIBILITY

The Comprehensive Plan supports the development of a unified, green streetscape project on North Washington Street. Chapter Three of the Comprehensive Plan entitled "Community Character, Appearance, and Design" discusses the existing character of North Washington Street and explains that while streetscape conditions are adequate, they are neither very attractive nor functional for pedestrians. The Plan states that there are few street trees and crosswalks, and that the sidewalks are too narrow for a commercial area. This same section of the Comprehensive Plan explains how the completed sections of the West Broad Street Streetscape have had a positive impact on the appearance of the street, making it more inviting and attractive to pedestrians and motorists.

In addition, Chapter Four of the Comprehensive Plan entitled "Land Use and Economic Development" highlights a number of design guidelines for the North Washington Street Corridor that are relevant in the creation of a streetscape design. The Plan specifically states that the City should develop streetscape treatments similar to those in the West Broad Street Streetscape Plan for the North Washington Street corridor. It also states that the City should promote a positive image of the City as part of one of its gateways; create unique and innovative combinations of pedestrian access and public plazas or squares and a balance between the built and natural environment; and enhance pedestrian linkages to the Downtown/City Center area and the East Falls Church Metro Station.

Chapter Five of the Comprehensive Plan entitled "Natural Resources and the Environment" discusses the impacts of an overall increase in impervious surfaces in the City. The Plan states that the City has an impervious surface area of approximately 50 percent. This means that stormwater is rapidly reaching our local streams and is not likely to be absorbed into the ground.

One of the primary goals stated in this chapter is to reduce impervious surface areas and mitigate the effects of runoff. More specifically, Goal 2, Strategy H states that the City should “Ensure that all City-initiated projects are constructed using low impact development techniques and other best management practices (BMPs).”

In summary, the Comprehensive Plan advocates for the development of a streetscape along North Washington Street. Furthermore, the Plan supports the development of a “green” streetscape that will filter and reduce runoff along the corridor.

PROCESS

The City has been working with EDAW for almost one year. The City held a stakeholder meeting on May 1, 2008 to gain perspective from adjacent property owners on their vision of North Washington Street. See Attachment 1 for a summary of the public meeting. EDAW and the City followed this larger public meeting with individual meetings on September 25, 2008 with business owners along the corridor. The team met with representatives from Browns Hardware, Kaiser Permanente, Columbia Baptist Church, Akridge (proposed Gateway site), Hekemian (Northgate developer), and Sunrise Assisted Living. Based on the input received from the public, business owners, and City staff, EDAW has been able to refine the project design and ensure that it meets the needs of residents, businesses, and the City. Staff is now seeking comments from the Planning Commission that also will be incorporated into the final product.

In 1987, the City adopted a streetscape plan for West Broad Street. The City followed a similar process then to develop a Plan. The adopted plan for this corridor includes the construction of brick sidewalks and street crosswalks, planters, trees and shrubs, cohesive lighting, and street furniture. The West Broad Street Streetscape has been implemented over the past 20 years through private development projects and through City effort.

The North Washington Streetscape project is similar in that it will develop a unified vision for the street that can be implemented over time either as sites redevelop, or as City funds allow. In addition, the City is hoping to partner with existing businesses along the corridor to implement in locations that are not likely to redevelop in the near future.

TIMING

This is the first worksession with the Planning Commission to review the conceptual design for this project. The final streetscape project, which will include 60% engineered drawings and a set of design guidelines, will be submitted to the City for the entire corridor within the next three to six months. The Planning Commission will be asked to make a formal recommendation to the City Council. The plan will also be reviewed by the Architectural Advisory Board, other Boards and Commissions, and community groups. The Plan ultimately will be adopted by the City Council.

The Northgate project will be the first site to implement the North Washington Streetscape Plan. The site plan was approved with a placeholder streetscape design, with the understanding that the applicant would amend the site plan once the streetscape design for the entire corridor is adopted. The Planning Commission will be asked to approve a site plan amendment for this site once the

corridor-wide design is approved. In addition, the approved design will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan as part of the update process.

Attachments:

1. Public Meeting #1 Summary

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TO Wendy Block Sanford
FROM Ryan Bouma
DATE May 27, 2008
CC Dennis Carmichael, EDAW
SUBJECT Questionnaire Responses

As a follow-up to the May 1st, North Washington Street public meeting we have compiled the questionnaire responses we have received to date. The input includes suggestions and observations submitted on comment forms as well as those discussed during the meeting. A brief summary is included for each of the questions. The responses were as follows:

What is the best thing about North Washington Street?

Summary:

In general, the respondents seem to value the planted median near Jennings Park, The mature trees, views of the church steeples and the State Theater.

Individual comments submitted on comment forms:

1. The island planted with trees and flowers
2. Good elements/potential. No horrid permanent mistakes yet. Chance to get it right from the start.
3. State Theater
4. The State Theater
5. - View of Crossman church steeple
- Nice medians, with trees.
6. Uniformly wide and mainly straight – good visibilities at intersections
7. The center median strip as you enter the city from Arlington.
9. There are sidewalks on both sides.
10. - Mature trees on both sides of the sidewalks
- Some old Victorian homes/office buildings
- low height buildings
- old charm –quaint
- feeling of main street versus a freeway
11. Nothing
12. The view from the bridge over Rt 66 coming from Arlington of the heavily forested area and the two steeples, especially at night.

Comments recorded during meeting discussion:

- Sidewalks on both sides.
- The pedestrian road is wide and straight

- *Planted Island*
- *Good sight distances and visibility*
- *Tree saved in Jennings Park*
- *State Theater*

What is the worst thing about North Washington Street?

Summary:

In general, the respondents reacted unfavorably to the narrowness of the sidewalks, the lack of perceived separation between pedestrians and vehicles, Speed of traffic, and lack of pedestrian amenities like covered bus shelters and hospitable street crossings.

Individual comments submitted on comment forms:

1. *Fast traffic going down toward 4 mile run, speed & volume.*
2. *One side is basically a dead zone.*
3. *Narrow Sidewalks, close to street.*
4. *Crossing the street in the area near the fire station.*
5. *Sidewalks too narrow, close to traffic.*
6. *No buffers between pedestrian and auto thoroughfares.*
7. *Sidewalk to street space may be too narrow for plantings especially the lower end toward Broad St.*
8. *Rush hour traffic.*
9. *Width of sidewalks and closeness to cars.*
10. *Pedestrian crossings (difficult to cross street along Washington St.), speeding vehicles and volume.*
11. *its ugly.*
12. *pollutants, lack of pedestrian "friendliness", and lack of bike "friendliness".*

Comments recorded during meeting discussion:

- *Traffic high speed and volume high*
- *The curves creates the sense that cars are coming at you*
- *Inadequate crosswalk markings*
- *There is only one covered bus shelter*
- *No bike lanes*
- *The width of the sidewalks is minimal*
- *The cars parked along the sidewalk at the bottom of the hill*
- *Crowd control along State Theater*
- *Cross walk on south side of Park and Washington St.*
- *Parking lots close to sidewalk make pedestrians uncomfortable.*

If you could add just one thing, what would you add?

Summary:

In general, the respondents suggested additional trees and ornamental plantings, wider sidewalks and additional pedestrian amenities like bus shelters, and enhanced crossing facilities. Care should be taken to create an entry to both Falls Church and Arlington which acknowledges Four Mile Run.

Individual comments submitted on comment forms:

1. Safe wide sidewalks/curb cuts
2. More green vertical elements on both sides. Median is a good start.
3. More trees.
4. How about three?
 1. On-street parking
 2. wide sidewalks
 3. ground floor rental and apt and townhouse fronts.
5. More pedestrian crossings, attractive and safe.
6. Bus stop shelters.
7. Trees, trees, trees (sorry that's 3).
8. Traffic light at Great Falls street.
9. Bike lanes on both sides
10. Refuge for pedestrian crossing streets so they have some protection from vehicles when stuck in the middle of road. Grass strip with flowers, shrubs, trees.
11. Green spaces.
12. TONS OF TREES.

Comments recorded during meeting discussion:

- Add corridor bus shelters to corridor
- Add visual separation between cars and pedestrians
- Add safe wider sidewalks and crosswalks
- Add more trees and shrubs and flowers
- Make Arlington and falls church read as one. Create a cohesive transition and an entry to both communities.
- Add four mile run identification and interpretation (signage).
- Add an Inviting Pedestrian Experience
- Add bus stop at Gresham and Wash but coordinate with Arlington stops to the north (west lee)
- Add pedestrian amenities such as recycling bins.

If you could take away one thing, what would you take away?

Summary:

In General, the respondents suggested removal of overhead utility lines and the need to create a visual buffer between cars and pedestrians.

Individual comments submitted on comment forms:

1. The curve in the road.
2. Dead zone on west side.
3. Traffic
4. Utility poles.
5. Utility wires.
6. Sidewalks clutter, especially print media handout boxes.
7. The closeness of the sidewalks to the road without any buffer from the heavy traffic.
9. Surface parking next to sidewalks with no buffers.
10. Vehicular high speeds.
11. Overhead Utilities.
12. buildings so close to the street...move them back and adding 10' + more for wider walking boulevards, outdoor cafes and lots of buffer and tiered landscaping for a more park-like entrance to the City....Something that actually typifies the difference between Falls Church and many other suburbs of DC.

Comments recorded during meeting discussion:

- Overhead Utilities
- Sidewalk Clutter

What street represents your vision of what North Washington Street should become?

Summary:

In General, the respondents favored active streetscapes with mature canopy trees and uniform lighting, signage and street furnishings. There are differing viewpoints on the setbacks for future buildings.

Individual comments submitted on comment forms:

2. Elements of Clarendon.
4. Broad St. (with less thru traffic).
5. N. Washington, at the Hekemian project, once Hekemian is built.
6. The north side of West Broad between Little Falls and No. Virginia.
7. Little Falls between Park and Great Falls the red maples on the side of City Hall have a wide median that allows mature growth.
9. Wisconsin Avenue around Macomb Street in DC. Wide enough sidewalks, on street parking – no surface parking, buildings close to sidewalks and buffers next to street
10. Park Ave. from Great Falls in Falls Church.
11. Parts of West Broad Street.
12. I have many visions of places in Reston, Alexandria, Arlington, actually all over the Commonwealth, that are much improved because of large setbacks from the street indicating the "arrival" to a special place.

Comments recorded during meeting discussion:

- Columbia Pike- In Annandale plus trees
- Lee Highway in Fairfax with trees
- Broad St. – Little Falls- North Virginia Avenue with trees.
- Park Ave. from City hall- Great Falls